

[You Can Do What You Want To]

Approximately 3,000 words

29 B SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: YOU CAN DO WHAT YOU WANT TO

Date of First Writing December 1, 1939

Name of Person Interviewed Mrs. Colie Craft (white)

Fictitious Name The Crofton Family

Street Address R.F.D. #3

Place, Columbia, S.C.

Occupation Textile Worker

Name of Writer Mattie T. Jones

Name of Reviser State Office

"No, sir, I'm not the least bit interested. We don't want to sell at all. For \$5,000? Don't list it at any price. It's simply not for sale," Mrs. Crofton said emphatically and hung up the receiver. "That real estate man is determined to get my house sold; but he just as well let me alone about it. I've no notion of selling it. I've worked too bloomin' hard to pay for it. It's not fine, but it's been home to us for ten years, and we love every old board in it. C10- 1/[31?]/41 - S.C.

"Course, this living room furniture belongs to Eugenia. When she was a teeny bit of a thing I promised her a suit if she'd be the right kind of a girl. And she had been so good by the time she was twelve years old that I let her go up street and buy what she wanted; and I paid for it, piano and all.

"I had to keep my promise to Kirby, too, and that cost me an automobile," she continued proudly. "Me and him agreed if he'd never curse nor drink nor smoke till he was twenty-one, he could have a car. Well, he got it all right, a brand new Chevrolet.

"But the children had a mighty hard time trying to get an education, and neither one of 'em has ever throwed away any money. You see these diplomas - Five of 'em on the walls. I can show you just as many medals. Kirby won two and Eugenia, three. Besides, Eugenia was valedictory of her class when she finished high school. They both finished when they were sixteen and started in at the University of South Carolina the next fall. They both took that ABC course - or do they call it an A.B. course? But Kirby didn't graduate. Eugenia's been teaching in the grammar school at Gibson, North Carolina, four years. That child's a born teacher, too. When she wasn't but eight years old she had a play school in our back yard under a big oak tree. I mean the children would take it in, too. She's always loved children. She's been teaching Sunday School every since she was fifteen years old.

"I hate debt worse 'n anybody in the world, I reckon, and I was determined not to go in debt for their education. So the child's had to do all sorts of things to get through college. She's kept house for people, corrected typing papers, worked in the mill, and cleaned up that 3 barber shop right out there. She got fifty cent a day for that, but it was awful dirty work. Soon as she graduated, she started in on her master's degree at the university, and she'll get that this summer. And she ain't stopping at that, either. She told me this fall, 'Don't you think I'll quit with that. Nobody's going to block me; I'm headed straight for Columbia

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University.' And she'll get there, too. She's pretty as a peach, and she's got lots o' boy friends; but I don't think she's really in love with any of them.

"My mother's been living with me fourteen years, and the children think the world of her. I'll call her."

"It's my job to wash all the dishes every morning," said Mrs. Schaffeur, who was drying her hands on her apron as she came into the room. "When that's done, I start out visiting all our neighbors before it's time to start dinner. I tell 'em I've worked in the field since I knowed how to get out there and I think I ought to have some rest now. Mary, ain't it about time for Kirby to come over?"

"He may not come this morning, Mother. You forget he has a wife now, and she has to have some of his attention. Janie comes with him, and I reckon she's still got on her pajamas. I'm glad Kirby's got such a fine house to live in now. His life's been plenty hard all along. He's had paper routes ever since he's been big enough to carry papers, and he's always turned his money over to me to take care of for him. As soon as he was old enough, he got a job in the mill. He was soon making about twelve dollars a week. Just after we come to Columbia, he delivered papers from 4:30 to 6:30 o'clock in the morning; slept from 7 to 9; and then to school. In the afternoon he slept from 2 till 5 o'clock and worked eleven hours in the 4 mill. He graduated from high school at sixteen, just like Eugenia, and entered the University of South Carolina. His expenses ran from \$100 to \$200 a year, and we had a pretty tough time getting it paid, but we met all the payments somehow. In the middle of his last year, he saw an 'ad' in The State and answered it. The Standard Oil Company wanted a man at \$75 a month. This was too great a temptation to Kirby, and he decided to stop school and take the job. I told Ma it was providential; for the very day Kirby started work, the first Monday in September, a strike was called at the mill and Kirby woulder been out of work three weeks. Then they compromised. That was five years ago, and we ain't had a strike since. In two years, Kirby took a notion he'd go back to school and study law, working for the Standard in the afternoons when he could. But he

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just stayed a year that time. He got in his head about getting married, and we couldn't do a thing with him.”

“Now, Mary, you know you are the one who put a stop to him going to school,” interrupted Mrs. Schaffeur. “You know you wanted a preacher, instead of a lawyer, out of him. That's the reason he quit like he did. But he's never felt a call to preach yet. Maybe he will some day, though. Mary, put some more wood on the fire. I'm cold. Better brown a body's legs than be cold.”

“Kirby had been in love for two years with the stenographer that worked in the same place where he worked.” Mrs. Crofton continued, as she replenished the fire. “And I reckon it was about time they were getting married. It was a big afternoon wedding at Washington Street Church. She was Janie Perdue, Mr. Robert Perdue's daughter. And she had the most parties I ever seen, eighteen or twenty or more. For two weeks there was a party every night, and some in the daytime too. And the most presents!

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Never seen such a lot of nice presents in all my life. They went on their honeymoon to Washington in his car. Brought us this plaque from Washington. He's mighty good to take us all on trips in the Chevrolet. We've been 'most everywhere in it, Miami and to the mountains and to Myrtle Beach, and we're going to Greenville next Sunday to hear Reverend Johnson preach. He's the preacher we had before this one, and we were all crazy about him. We all belong to Whaley Street Methodist Church. Kirby's always been a good church worker. Been a Sunday School superintendent, a steward, and an usher. But he's joining Washington Street Methodist Church now. He's making more than \$100 a month, and I reckon it was the best for him to marry. They're living with her folks, but he comes to see us real often, and she nearly always comes with him.

“I'm pretty sleepy,” Mrs. Crofton yawned. “Didn't got enough sleep last night. They called me at 7 o'clock this morning, because we had so much ironing to do. I go to the mill at 4

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o'clock in the afternoon and work till midnight, but I don't get to sleep till after 1 o'clock. When I get home every night, I wake Mother up and we kindle a fire and sit and talk for an hour or more. We make coffee and eat something, if we can find anything to eat. We done eat up our Christmas fruit cake, and we've got to make another one before the children come home.

"We get pretty lonesome with both children gone, but we have company nearly all the time. Eugenia's coming home for Christmas in her car. Says she's going to leave it here for us to enjoy a while. I can't drive, but she says she can learn me. She says there ain't never been nothing I couldn't learn how to do if I wanted to bad enough. An' I reckon that's the truth. Eugenia'll want to have a bridge party soon as she gets here, 6 I know. I just as well get the fruit cake ready, so I can serve refreshments."

"It's funny about cards," Mrs. Schaffeur added. "I useter lay every one I could find in the fire. Now Mary has bridge parties in her own house. Ain't times changed?"

"I never had no time to play anything, Mother," Mrs. Crofton resumed. "I worked in the field all the time till I got married. I was sixteen and married a man more'n twice as old as I was. Daniel was a close neighbor of ours. When his wife died, he said he was so lonesome and the children needed a mother so bad, that I reckon I just couldn't get rid of him. He has a house and that was one thing I had always longed for, a home I could call my own."

"We lived on a farm two years," Mrs. Crofton continued "and then we moved to Cayce, where we lived for thirteen years. Daniel run a little meat market at first, and then he was chief policeman. I was the postmistress and kept boarders, too. I've worked everywhere you find me, but those were the days that seem the hardest to me now.

"My salary as postmistress was \$75 a month at first, and then it was raised to \$90. Camp Jackson was being built then, and I had fifteen or twenty men boarding with me.

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They were carpenters. I only charged them \$5.50 a week, they went home on Saturday afternoons.

“But we decided to move back to the farm, this time to live on one hundred acres Daniel got when his father died. We sold that farm to my stepson four years ago, but not one cent has he paid on it. From there we came to Columbia ten years ago. I was discouraged with working so hard in the field and having nothing to show for it. Then I was determined to educate my children, and that seemed the only chance. I got a job in the spinning room at Olympia, and I've been there ever since. At first I made \$11; then \$19.80 for three years. But they took us women off that shift, and now I only make \$12.50

“We've had so much sickness and such big doctor bills to pay. I've never been strong. I've had three operations. Right after me and Daniel got married, he took blood poison from a teeny little scratch on his hand. His whole arm got black and swelled up till it was twice its size. For weeks I stayed up nearly all night working with that hand. The doctor was here every day for three months. Looked like Daniel would die in spite of all we could do.

“He has had to walk on crutches for a long time and now has almost no use of his hand. He sells at the city market. Tries to sell produce, turkey, chickens, vegetables, and other things which he has bought. He has a cot there and never comes home nights unless it's very cold. Has to stay there to keep anybody from taking his things, you know. Really, he don't make expenses; but it gives him something to do and to think about, and so we let him do it.

“Sometimes I've thought I'd start a budget, but I never have knowed how to start. I just pay all my bills with what I got at the mill, and then with my rent money, usually about \$75 a month, I make investments. I consider real estate the best one I can make.

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"I built a house at Cayce that cost me, lot and all, \$2,400, and I've sold it this week to a friend for \$2,650. It is valued at \$3,200. But it certainly [dreaded?] me to build that house. I mean it took every cent I had to pay for it.

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"My barber shop is possibly my best investment; this one right here by the house. I built it nine years ago and it cost me \$400. I've rented it every year for \$20 a month; so you see I paid for it the first two years, including interest, taxes, and all. The other seven years I've made good money on it. The same man I built it for has rented it every year and pays his rent regularly, too. I have a life insurance policy for \$2,000, and Daniel has one for \$1,000. My taxes amount to about \$60.

"Yes, we have enough land around the house for a small garden, and for several years I have tried to have a garden. But I find I can buy my vegetables cheap, about as cheap as I can grow them. I either had to hire the garden worked or work it myself, when I wasn't able; so I put flowers in that space. Yes, I sold a few of them, but I didn't plant them to sell. I planted them to enjoy myself and to cut for my friends. I'm trying to enjoy life a little more now - not think about saving all the time like I used to. I had to save then.

"The girl who brought my mail in is a mighty sweet girl. She's a cousin of mine, just like one of my own younguns. I borrow from her, and she borrows from me when we get out of money. I realize it don't pay me to keep one boarder, but she helps with the work, kind of like home folks. She goes home every week-end and just pays me \$3.50 a week. She comes home with me at midnight from the mill. It's a quarter of a mile from the mill to our house."

"Mary, did you give that man that come here this morning the contract for your new house at Cayce?" Mrs. Schaffeur interrupted.

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"No, ma'am, I didn't, and he ain't likely to get it tomorrow, when he comes back, either. I smelt whiskey on his breath; didn't you? You 9 know I don't have no patience with a thing like that, and I don't have nobody work for me if he drinks and I know it."

"Well, I see they are making plans to inaugurate our new governor," Mrs. Crofton continued, as she opened the morning paper. We liked the old governor, and we like the new one just a little better. Like President Roosevelt better and better all the time, too. Everybody in the family voted for both of them."

"No, Mary" explained Mrs. Schaffeur, "You have forgot I didn't vote this time. Not that I'm opposed to woman voting, even if it was considered disgraceful when I was growing up. But somehow I didn't feel like I wanted to vote this time, and I just decided I'd stay at home and pray and ask the Lord to manage the election. I thought that He could do more about it than I could."

"Oh, Queenie, are you cold?" Mrs. Crofton exclaimed, as a Chinese Chow humbly sought admittance to the room. "I plumb forgot to let my doggie in this morning. She's a beauty, but let me show you her pups. They're prettier than she is. Come around to the side yard. Ain't they the sweetest things you ever saw? Those two brown ones especially. They're just six weeks old, and I can sell them for ten dollars apiece. But I've already promised to give them to some friends. I'm so crazy about them, though, I don't see how I'm ever to let them go. These dogs and my flowers are all the recreation I have. When I get plumb worried down, these puppies and my flowers help to pull me up."

"Mary, is my breakfast ready?" a frail-looking man asked, as he washed his hands on the back porch.

"Lawsy me, yes, I guess Mother's keeping it warm for you. I haven't had mine either, though I should have been ironing long ago. It's after ten o'clock, ain't it?"